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ABSTRACT

This paper urges foundations and state and federal agencies to consider funding rural community colleges, in light of the successful experiences of the Rural Community College Initiative. Much of rural America is in trouble because educational attainment and job opportunities are low; innovation is stifled by poor schools, isolation, and powerlessness; and geographic isolation and poor infrastructure make it difficult to link to the global economy. The key to rural renewal is educational access, economic development, and civic capacity-building. Community colleges are perfectly positioned to provide these, yet they are seldom on the radar screens of foundations or government agencies concerned with rural development. Grantmakers can fund community-oriented programs at rural community colleges such as outreach to underserved populations, service learning, community leadership development, K-16 partnerships, curriculum development relevant to local culture and economy, and distance learning and technology. Funders can support institutional development and help break down isolation in rural colleges through professional development programs. Strategies for promoting systemic change include investing in administrator education and policy-oriented consortia. States can assist their community colleges without increasing state budgets by promoting community service and service learning at community colleges, encouraging community leadership programs, and using community colleges as institutional homes for small business assistance programs. Two appendices present selected public and philanthropic programs and lessons on design of rural development programs. (TD)

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STRATEGIES for FUNDERS

Community Colleges and Rural Development

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The Rural Community College Initiative

The Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) is a national project that supports community colleges in distressed rural areas in moving their people and communities toward prosperity. The RCCI's dual goals are increasing access to education and developing regional economies — both equipping people for productive, rewarding work and increasing the region's capacity to provide that work. These goals are achieved through a team-based, long-term strategic planning and implementation process; leadership development; skills development; peer learning and networking; and exposure to innovative and effective strategies for educational access and economic development.

RCCI began in 1994, when The Ford Foundation invited nine community and tribal colleges to engage in this unique approach to community development. In 1997, a second round of 15 colleges joined RCCI. The demonstration phase of the Initiative lasted from 1994 through 2001 and is the subject of this report. The demonstration was a partnership among the 24 participating community colleges; The Ford Foundation; the American Association of Community Colleges; and MDC Inc., a nonprofit organization that conducts research and manages demonstration projects in economic and workforce development. In 2002, RCCI began a new phase, directed by the Southern Rural Development Center and the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development.

MDC Inc.

The mission of MDC is to advance the South through strategies that expand opportunity, reduce poverty, and build inclusive communities. The organization furthers its mission by analyzing economic, workforce, and demographic trends to identify challenges that impede progress for the region and its people. To address those challenges, MDC works from multiple angles, including: developing responsive public policies; demonstrating effective programs; building institutional and community capacity for progress; and informing the public dialogue on development issues.

Established in 1967 to help North Carolina make the transition from an agricultural to an industrial economy and from a segregated to an integrated workforce, MDC has spent the last 35 years publishing research and developing policies and programs to strengthen the workforce, foster economic development, and remove the barriers between people and jobs. MDC now works to facilitate the South's transition to a high-performing, multiracial society where economic, workforce, and community development work for all people and communities.

MDC is a private, nonprofit supported with grants and contracts from foundations; federal, state, and local governments; and the private sector.

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PREFACE

In the early 1990s, The Ford Foundation became interested in funding a national initiative focused on rural community colleges. Steve Zwerling, a program officer in what was then the Foundation's Education Division, commissioned a study and convened a series of meetings with rural experts. Among those he talked with were Betsy Campbell of the Foundation's Rural Poverty Division and George B. Autry, founding president of MDC Inc.

Betsy Campbell was seeking new strategic approaches for the Foundation's grantmaking in the rural U.S.; she wanted to target institutions that could lead rural development efforts in high-poverty regions. George Autry's 25 years of work in the South had taught him that rural prosperity hinged on two intertwined approaches: improving access to education and developing the local economy. His work with community colleges had convinced him that these institutions had the right mission, people-power, and flexibility to lead both efforts. Steve Zwerling had a deep commitment to community colleges and their access mission. Fortuitously, The Ford Foundation was eager to test a new approach to grantmaking that tackled problems holistically, bringing together knowledge and resources from multiple program areas within the Foundation.

Discussions among Autry, Campbell, and Zwerling, with consultation from a small group of rural community college presidents, led to the creation of the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI). The Initiative represented a unique collaboration among the two divisions of The Ford Foundation and MDC. It built on MDC's experience with community colleges as engines for workforce and economic development as well as MDC's work with rural communities on leadership development and community change. It drew on the long-standing commitment of the Foundation's Education Division to community colleges as institutions that provide access to higher education to poor people, especially in urban areas. And it drew on the Rural Poverty Division's knowledge about effective approaches to rural development in persistently poor regions.

MDC designed and managed RCCI's seven-year demonstration phase, from 1994-2001. During this period The Ford Foundation underwent a major reorganization in which the two divisions funding the Initiative became "Education, Media, Arts and Culture," (recently renamed "Knowledge, Creativity, and Freedom") and "Asset-Building and Community Development." Program officers changed more than once, but the Foundation kept its commitment to the Initiative. It described RCCI as a partnership among two divisions of The Ford Foundation, MDC, the 24 grantee colleges, and the American Association of Community Colleges (AACC), which conducted a multiyear assessment of the Initiative. Now, in 2002, the Foundation is funding a four-year follow-up that will build on the lessons of the demonstration phase and will introduce RCCI to additional colleges.

Early in the RCCI demonstration, program officers Campbell and Zwerling began talking with their counterparts at the Kellogg Foundation about possible collaboration in support of rural community colleges. Like Ford, the Kellogg Foundation had a long-standing commitment to community colleges and rural development. It had supported community college leadership programs, tribal colleges, and many rural development initiatives. Its Engaged Institutions program had encouraged colleges and universities to become active players in community development. Program officers at the two foundations thought they might accomplish even more by working together and drawing in additional funders.

To that end, in December 1998, the two foundations and MDC convened a meeting of rural community and tribal college presidents, public and private funders, university representatives, and state policymakers.

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They discussed ways to support rural community colleges as catalysts for rural development, including creating a structure for a formal alliance of rural community colleges. They expressed enthusiasm for the RCCI model and urged MDC to disseminate lessons from the demonstration widely to other grantmakers and policymakers.

Today, after a full seven years of managing and observing RCCI, MDC has much to share with funders. This paper offers MDC's insights about the strengths and limitations of community colleges as leaders of rural development efforts as well as our insights about the design and management of effective rural development programs. We hope the paper and accompanying video raise awareness of the roles community colleges can play in rural renewal. Ultimately, we hope to see increased public and philanthropic investment in community colleges as agents for change in distressed rural regions.

RCCI was the largest foundation-funded rural development demonstration program of the 1990s. Today there is new interest in rural development on the part of several regional foundations as well as the National Rural Funders Collaborative, which aims to leverage $100 million over the next ten years. At the federal level, the 2002 Farm Bill includes a new emphasis on rural community development. For funders that want to support rural development — whether local, regional, or national foundations, state or federal government — the RCCI experience offers useful insights.

The demonstration has generated many other materials in addition to this paper and video that may be of interest to funders. These are listed on page 22, and may be ordered or downloaded at www.mdcinc.org.

MDC thanks both the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and The Ford Foundation for their support of this paper and the companion video.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Why should funders be concerned about rural development? Because much of rural America — from Appalachia to the Deep South, the Rio Grande Valley, the Southwestern deserts, and Indian Country — is in trouble. Today's economy places distressed rural regions at more of a disadvantage than ever because:

- *An educated, skilled workforce is essential to a healthy economy.* Educational attainment is low in distressed rural regions, and the dearth of job opportunities makes it hard for communities to hold onto their high school and college graduates.
- *Innovation is essential to prosperity for companies and communities.* Because of isolation, poor schools, and a sense of powerlessness, innovation often is stifled in distressed rural communities.
- *Communities need links to the global economy.* Geographic remoteness and poor infrastructure make it difficult for distressed rural communities to forge the connections that make places competitive.

For funders and public agencies that care about rural people and communities, this paper provides guidance on how to improve philanthropy and public policy in support of rural development. Both philanthropy and government have important roles to play in helping rural citizens build stronger, more prosperous communities, where education is valued and young people have viable options for livelihood. Community development efforts must be locally led. But state, regional, and national grantmakers can provide essential funding, learning opportunities, and motivation for local leaders to explore fresh strategies for rural renewal.

After managing and observing the Rural Community College Initiative (RCCI) for seven years, MDC is convinced that the most effective approach to rural development is at once people-based and place-based. The RCCI has shown the potential of community colleges to lead such an approach.

Community colleges are widely recognized for providing flexible, affordable academic and technical education and workforce training. RCCI demonstrated that they also can lead community change efforts. In fact, community colleges are an excellent institutional match for the agenda that we believe is the key to rural renewal — educational access, economic development, and civic capacity-building. Yet two-year colleges are seldom on the radar screens of foundations or government agencies concerned with rural development.

We urge foundations and state and federal agencies to take a new look at rural community colleges in light of the RCCI experience. Consider the contributions they can make to expanding educational opportunities for adults and young people. Examine their potential to nurture business development and entrepreneurship, organize regional partnerships, and prepare a highly skilled workforce. Also keep them in mind as institutions that can lead comprehensive community-change efforts.

Consider making grants to community colleges for economic and community development as well as technology, community outreach, and innovative educational initiatives. Investments in rural colleges can pay off many times over in resources leveraged, people affected, and communities transformed.

RURAL CHALLENGES, PROMISING RESPONSES

Threatened Communities

The U.S. entered the twentieth century as a predominantly rural nation. Today rural communities are home to just one in five Americans, and their problems tend to stay below the public's radar. Some rural regions — especially those near metropolitan centers and those with natural amenities that attract tourists, retirees, and footloose businesses — are growing and prospering. But much of rural America experienced high poverty and population loss even during the widespread national prosperity of the 1990s.

This paper is concerned with rural regions that are economically distressed — places with low income, high poverty, high unemployment or underemployment, and/ or dramatic disparities in income and wealth. The paper focuses on the three types of regions that were represented in the RCCI demonstration: (1) the "persistent poverty" regions in Appalachia, the Deep South, the Southwest, and western Indian reservations, where poverty rates have been high for decades; (2) regions currently suffering from structural economic change such as the textile/tobacco belt in the Carolinas and Virginia; and (3) certain areas high in natural amenities, such as coastal South Carolina and northern New Mexico, where a booming tourism and retirement economy is juxtaposed with traditionally excluded, low-wealth racial and ethnic minority populations.

Despite their differences, these regions share common and interrelated characteristics that hold them back. Some have depended historically on a single industry (coal, timber, textile manufacturing, or a military base) that is no longer viable. In many cases, land and assets were — and still are — held by just a few people, often absentee owners. Many of these communities have low levels of entrepreneurship and poor access to capital for business investment. They are further held back by persistent underinvestment in public education and infrastructure, such as water, sewer, and high-speed telecommunications. Often these problems are compounded by geographic remoteness.

Related to these economic disadvantages are a mix of daunting sociopolitical challenges. Many of these regions and communities suffer from deep race and class divisions and a narrow leadership base. Rural isolation, combined with a sense of powerlessness, often keeps out new ideas and stifles innovation. Public schools are poorly funded because of a weak tax base, an economy that doesn't require high skills, and a local ethic that says the poor do not need a good education. All this is compounded by the historic out-migration of the best educated and most entrepreneurial, who have left in search of better opportunity.

In today's economy, this cluster of conditions places communities at more of a disadvantage than ever because:

- *An educated, skilled workforce is essential to a healthy economy.* Educational attainment is low in distressed rural regions, and the dearth of job opportunities makes it hard for communities to hold onto their high school and college graduates.
- *Innovation is essential to prosperity for companies and communities.* Because of isolation, poor schools, and a sense of powerlessness, innovation often is stifled in distressed rural communities.
- *Communities need links to the global economy.* Geographic remoteness and poor infrastructure make it difficult for distressed rural communities to forge the connections that make places competitive and put them "on the map."

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People and Places

Scholars, philanthropists, the federal government, and community activists have long debated how to improve economic opportunity in poor rural regions. A frequently asked strategic question is: Should rural development efforts focus on people (a human capital emphasis) or places (a local economic/community development emphasis)?

RCCI addressed both, based on the conviction that economic vitality in poor regions hinges on building the foundation for a stronger economy while also increasing educational opportunities for people. These two approaches are essential because they address a common dilemma in distressed rural regions: A community cannot attract or develop jobs without an educated workforce, but it cannot retain educated workers without a strong economy.

The emphasis on education is especially important in persistently poor rural regions where education levels are low and K-12 schools suffer from chronic underinvestment. It is more important than ever today, since solid education, a skilled workforce, and good schools are increasingly essential to economic competitiveness. Equally important is the ability to adapt to change, which is closely linked to education.

From the start, RCCI's dual goals were "educational access and economic development." Across the country, what economic development means to many people is simply business development. But to build healthy economies, RCCI communities needed to do much more than develop businesses.[1] They needed to build the foundation for a stronger economy by strengthening the civic infrastructure — broadening the base of civic leadership, strengthening bonds of trust across the community, building alignment around a common vision for the future, and nurturing a spirit of innovation. Over the seven years of the RCCI demonstration, these civic capacity-building strategies took on increasing prominence as sites became convinced of their importance. In fact, one of the important things RCCI demonstrated was rural community colleges' passion and talent for leading civic capacity-building efforts.

Assets, Equity, and Other Core Principles

Based on MDC's 35 years of work in the rural South and on the RCCI experience, we believe that communities can most effectively tackle the challenges of economic development and education by working in certain ways. In our experience, the most successful rural communities:

- **Develop broad-based leadership; an inclusive, collaborative civic culture; and alignment around a common vision.** Communities that value diversity and practice collaborative, open decision-making are more successful economically than those with narrowly held political power and deep race or class divisions.
- **Build on local assets.** Many economically distressed rural regions have rich cultural traditions; natural resources; capable, hard-working people; and other assets that can be powerful boosters for revitalizing the economy. Successful communities understand what their assets are, and they find ways to preserve their valued heritage while developing compatible economic activity.

[1] MDC's paper, *The Building Blocks of Community Development*, discusses six arenas that communities must address to revitalize their economies: business development; workforce development; physical, social, and civic infrastructure; and cultural/environmental stewardship. The paper is available on MDC's website, www.mdcinc.org.

- **Honestly assess and confront community problems.** In successful communities, leaders do not sweep problems under the rug. They recognize that the divides of race, wealth, culture, and political geography (competition among neighboring towns or counties) are particular threats to fragile rural communities. They are willing to name these and other problems and work to overcome them.
- **Work to improve education while also building the economy.** In today's economy, education and training are essential to help people get good jobs wherever they choose to live. But in distressed rural regions, educating people without creating local economic opportunity means that most high school and college graduates will leave home. And in these regions, low educational attainment is a severe barrier to economic development that must be addressed directly if the economy is to thrive.
- **Act to achieve equity and excellence.** The most successful communities are committed to guaranteeing all people — rich and poor, town and country, all races and cultures — access to high-quality education, with support to help them succeed in school and in the economy.
- **Seek out new ideas, reduce the community's isolation, and build a culture of innovation and "public entrepreneurship."** Economic vitality is enhanced by civic-minded residents who scout out promising models for community revitalization, develop innovative responses to local problems, and volunteer their time for community efforts. Successful communities also benefit from a lively nonprofit sector that initiates activities and services not provided by business or government.
- **Work regionally.** For too long, rural towns and counties have approached economic development as a competition against their neighbors. In today's economy, small communities achieve more when they pool resources, identify common assets, and work together to develop the regional economy.

Increasingly over the past decade, funders have used similar principles in the design of rural development programs. For instance, the federal government's signature community development effort of the 1990s — the Empowerment Zone/Enterprise Community (EZ/EC) program — emphasized local initiative. The program rewarded communities that used an inclusive, collaborative planning process; and it encouraged grantees to take a holistic approach to development that encompassed job creation, job training, infrastructure improvements, and related strategies.

Similarly, rural development programs of the Northwest Area Foundation, W.K. Kellogg Foundation, the National Rural Funders Collaborative, and a new program of The Duke Endowment take an asset-based approach to development in poor communities. They nurture broad-based community collaboratives and offer a "learning agenda" that gives grantees not just money but also exposure to new ideas. *(See Appendix A.)*

Which Institutions Can Lead Rural Renewal?

Funders committed to rural America face an institutional infrastructure that is sparse compared to most cities. There are fewer nonprofit organizations and fewer philanthropic and corporate resources. Local governments are small and have few specialized staff. Rural development programs have relied on a variety of organizations — local governments, regional councils of government, regional universities, community development corporations and other grassroots community development organizations (where they exist), churches, and others.

The Ford Foundation and MDC chose community colleges as the lead organizations for RCCI because they are flexible institutions whose mission and competencies enable them to advance the twin goals of

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educational access and economic development. Community colleges are widespread throughout rural America.[2] We anticipated that if RCCI was successful, it could point the way for college-led rural development work in many more communities.

A few years before RCCI's inception, the W.K. Kellogg Foundation had funded a program based at North Carolina State University that, like RCCI, looked to community colleges as catalysts for community change. The Academy for Community College Leadership Advancement, Innovation, and Modeling (ACCLAIM) program helped rural and urban colleges in North and South Carolina, Maryland, and Virginia engage their communities in a step-by-step process to solve community problems. ACCLAIM's rationale for placing community colleges in this leadership role was similar to RCCI's: Community colleges are imbedded in the fabric of their communities and highly regarded by community members; their mission is more comprehensive than that of any other community organization or agency; they are politically neutral institutions; and they have knowledge of and sensitivity to the social, economic, and political forces that shape their communities.[3]

The RCCI demonstration validated our expectations about the potential of community colleges to lead access and economic development efforts through collaborative, college/community partnerships. Many RCCI colleges were able to lead broad-based civic engagement efforts. They provided safe meeting grounds for bringing people together to create a common vision for their communities. They brought new ideas and a spirit of innovation to their communities, and they were effective in leveraging resources.[4]

In addition, community colleges have a permanent funding base and stable staff, which can enable them to work on long-term community development issues. Community colleges are not the perfect institutions to lead community change — they face some barriers, as discussed later in this paper — but given appropriate resources and support, they can be effective catalysts for change.

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[2] There are between 400 and 700 rural community colleges in the U.S.; the count varies depending on the definitions of "rural" and "community college."

[3] For more on ACCLAIM, see Edgar J. Boone and Associates, *Community Leadership through Community-Based Programming: The Role of the Community College*, Community College Press, American Association of Community Colleges, Washington DC, 1997.

[4] American Association of Community Colleges, *RCCI National Assessment Report*, Executive Summary, 2001.

The RCCI Experience

A Model for Community Change and Capacity-Building

RCCI is about energizing distressed rural communities and the local colleges that serve them. It is about change and capacity. Through a structured process of guided intervention, 24 colleges and their communities learned how to change, how to see themselves differently, how to build new partnerships, how to adapt new ideas to local needs, and how to implement collaborative college/community projects.

— Executive Summary of *RCCI National Assessment Report*, AACC, 2001

In launching RCCI, The Ford Foundation and MDC set out to demonstrate that rural community colleges could be effective catalysts for change in distressed rural areas. The initial model was simple: We believed that if colleges worked in partnership with their communities on the two RCCI goals — economic development and educational access — they could increase economic vitality and individual opportunity. Early in the demonstration, we recognized that RCCI colleges also needed help strengthening their own institutional capacity as agents for community development and educational access. And as the demonstration evolved, the sites increasingly recognized that an important first step toward economic development was civic capacity-building — broadening the civic leadership base and creating a unified vision for their community or region's future.

The RCCI model for institutional capacity-building and community change is shown in Figure 1 *(see page 8)*. Each college was to create a leadership team composed of college and community representatives. The Initiative provided an array of resources to the team and the college:

- ***Modest grants.*** RCCI demonstration colleges received nine-month planning grants and multiyear implementation grants. The nine colleges that joined the demonstration in 1994 received annual implementation grants of $75,000 for two years, followed by smaller grants for five more years. The fifteen additional colleges that joined RCCI in 1997 received annual implementation grants of $75,000 for two years and smaller grants for two additional years. The colleges used their grants mainly for staff salaries (to support RCCI team leaders and coordinators), staff development, and seed money for new projects. They were able to leverage substantial support from foundations as well as state and federal government.
- ***Learning and networking.*** MDC's central role as RCCI manager was to facilitate learning opportunities for the colleges. We provided on-site coaching to help teams plan and implement projects and to reflect periodically on their work. We linked teams with technical assistance experts who advised them on particular organizational development, economic development, and access strategies. We organized semi-annual RCCI institutes where teams learned from each other's experiences and from national experts. We organized topical seminars, teleconferences, field trips to visit model programs, and other learning events. All these experiences served to seed new ideas in isolated rural communities. Over time, the RCCI gatherings created a valued peer-learning network.

- ***Strategic planning and community engagement.*** Through regular on-site coaching and RCCI institutes, MDC helped teams set goals, plan activities, assess progress, and mobilize their communities using MDC's *Moving from Vision to Action* planning and implementation process.[5]

Our hope was that, aided by these resources, the leadership team would generate new *projects* in the college and the community and a new *process* of broad-based collaboration — within the college and between college and community. This process and the new activities/strategies, in turn, would result in greater access to education and new economic opportunities. And they would build the institutional capacity and leadership needed for sustained, long-term problem-solving and innovation.

Community Colleges as Catalysts for Rural Development

The seven-year RCCI experience has shown that — given some help — community colleges can be effective catalysts for rural development, even in some of the most economically distressed places in the country. RCCI demonstrated many roles that community colleges can play in economic development and educational access.

Building the foundation for a stronger economy

To many people, economic development means simply job creation. In a depressed economy, it is essential to create new jobs, but the definition of economic development used in the RCCI demonstration went further. It emphasized creating opportunities for productive and rewarding work, business ownership, and reinvestment of wealth in the community.

RCCI promoted a vision of prosperity with equity: It urged communities to improve the prospects of people at the bottom of the economic ladder as well as raising the standard of living for the community as a whole.

Several of the strategic approaches taken by RCCI teams focused on building civic capacity, a prerequisite for more "hard-core" economic development activities. Other widespread strategies included nurturing small business development, spearheading regional economic development, and targeting workforce training to meet the needs of local employers. Often RCCI colleges forged new approaches based on lessons learned from other communities. In other instances, RCCI colleges replicated approaches that had proven successful elsewhere. In both cases, colleges capitalized on inspiration from outside to break their communities' intellectual isolation.

- ***Building civic capacity: A unified vision for prosperity and equity.*** For all communities — especially those held back by poverty, race and class divisions, and narrowly held political power — uniting behind a shared vision is a prerequisite for positive change. Several RCCI teams made community engagement a central piece of their work. Some, including New Mexico State University-Carlsbad and Mountain Empire Community College (Big Stone Gap, VA), organized "economic summits" to spark a community dialogue about problems, opportunities, and directions for the community. These events mobilized citizens to work together and pursue alternative approaches to economic development.
- ***Building civic capacity: A broader leadership base.*** In many rural communities, leadership is dominated by a small group who have a narrow perspective on the community's problems and tend to maintain the

[5] MDC has tailored its *Moving from Vision to Action* strategic planning and implementation process to fit a variety of institutional change and community change projects. The version developed for RCCI is included in the RCCI Toolkit in the form of a guidebook and instructional video. A generic version of the guidebook is available in MDC's *Building Communities by Design*, a collection of resources for community change practitioners.

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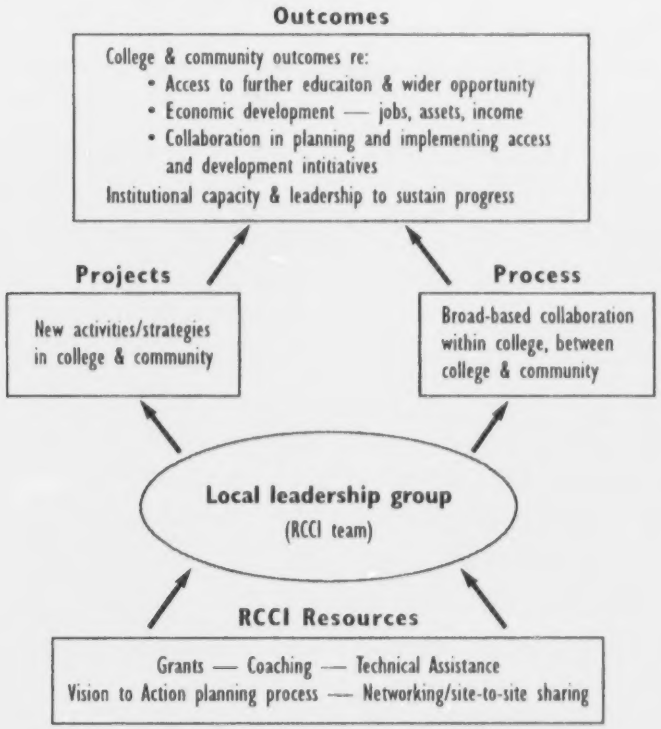
Figure 1

RCCI Model for Institutional Capacity-Building and Community Change


Outcomes
College & community outcomes re:
• Access to further educaiton & wider opportunity
• Economic development — jobs, assets, income
• Collaboration in planning and implementing access and development intitiatives
Institutional capacity & leadership to sustain progress
Projects
New activities/strategies in college & community
Process
Broad-based collaboration within college, between college & community
Local leadership group
(RCCI team)
RCCI Resources
Grants — Coaching — Technical Assistance
Vision to Action planning process — Networking/site-to-site sharing

status quo. Expanding the base of leadership can bring the community new energy, new ideas, and new directions.

RCCI addressed leadership development in several ways. Some colleges initiated leadership programs to involve more people in community affairs, especially minorities, youth, and lower-income people. Some tribal colleges worked with tribal government on economic development leadership, using RCCI's technical assistance resources to increase understanding of "nation building" as a foundation for economic development on the reservation. In addition, the RCCI itself was a leadership development program for team members. RCCI gave team members opportunities to learn about community change. It nurtured a supportive group of people committed to prosperity and equity and gave them the mandate to work for change.

- ***Building civic capacity: Creating new community development organizations.*** In most poor rural communities, the nonprofit sector is small and fragile. Funding for nonprofits is limited and tenuous, and most organizations focus on a narrow area of activity. Yet nonprofits increasingly are recognized as important players in facilitating community change and providing services not provided by the public or private sectors.

  Several RCCI teams provided leadership to create or strengthen community and economic development organizations. For example, Salish Kootenai College (a tribal college in Pablo, MT) helped build the capacity of a community development corporation (CDC) that developed housing and job opportunities in a small reservation community. Similarly, Northern New Mexico Community College (Espanola, NM) worked with community leaders to establish a new CDC to carry out community economic development work. Other RCCI teams worked with community partners to create microenterprise loan programs, a community foundation, and an innovative financing program for community water systems.
- ***Nurturing entrepreneurship and small business development.*** After analyzing opportunities for economic development in their communities, several RCCI teams decided to focus on strengthening small businesses. Teaching entrepreneurship and assisting small businesses were not new activities for community colleges. What RCCI provided was resources and technical assistance to help colleges leapfrog over the early, trial-and-error phase of program/curriculum development, to put effective programs and services in place quickly. Several RCCI sites established college-based small business assistance centers or entrepreneurship education programs.

  Other colleges acted as catalysts for new community partnerships that spawned a host of business support programs: small business loan funds; business incubators (including a specialized e-commerce incubator and a "commercial kitchen incubator"); Indian Chambers of Commerce; and programs that help artisans become successful entrepreneurs.
- ***Promoting a regional approach to economic development.*** Recognizing that economic development can best be tackled regionally, several RCCI colleges initiated regional development efforts.

Community colleges that served multicounty areas proved to be natural leaders in this arena.

RCCI colleges took varied approaches to regional development. For example, Sitting Bull College (on the Standing Rock Reservation spanning North and South Dakota) led a reservation-wide effort to develop tourism tied to the Lewis and Clark Bicentennial. Southwest Texas Junior College (Uvalde, TX) organized a "case competition" in 1998 which started a dialogue about regional economic development in a large, multicounty area and led to the area's designation as a rural Enterprise Community and later an Empowerment Zone. Fort Peck Community College (in Harlan, MT) also helped its reservation win Enterprise Community designation.

- ***Targeting workforce training to meet employers' needs.*** Across the country, the most widespread, well-recognized contribution to economic development by community colleges is workforce education. Some colleges used RCCI as an opportunity to initiate new workforce development programs or improve existing ones.

  Southwest Texas Junior College, for example, was an academically oriented institution that focused on transfer programs. Thanks to pressure from community members on the RCCI team, the college decided to create a new Business and Industry office. Within two years, that office had offered more than 50 short, noncredit job training courses and was self-supporting. Alabama Southern Community College (Monroeville, AL) worked with the chemical, pulp, and paper industry to establish a regional center for workforce training and technology to serve this important cluster of industries in its region. It developed a new technical degree program tied to industry skill standards that includes internships for students.

Improving access to education and further opportunity

Community colleges pride themselves on providing an affordable point of entry to higher education, and MDC's first challenge in working with RCCI colleges on access was helping them identify areas for improvement. RCCI urged colleges to see access as more than the traditional open door — we defined it as "access to the college and access through the college to further opportunity."

Tackling access challenges — such as raising graduation rates or reaching out to underserved and isolated populations — often meant reforming long-standing practices inside the college. Several aspects of RCCI helped bring about institutional change within the colleges. First, the structured planning process (*Moving from Vision to Action*) pointed out areas where access was weak. In some cases, community members on RCCI teams were instrumental in pushing their college to tackle long-standing problems identified in the planning process. In addition, RCCI provided an environment conducive to risk-taking. Twice-yearly meetings with peers from other sites gave college presidents and other administrators moral support and motivation to test new approaches. Finally, the flexible grant money, technical assistance, and learning opportunities provided by RCCI helped the colleges shape effective strategies.

RCCI colleges addressed the access challenge in a wide variety of ways:

- ***Forging connections between the college and K-12 schools and improving education at all levels.*** Many community colleges have connections to K-12 schools through dual enrollment programs and federally funded outreach programs such as Talent Search. RCCI encouraged colleges to work more intensively with K-12 systems to improve public education and prepare more young people for college. Southeast Community College (Cumberland, KY) created a program that works with students from middle school through high school graduation, providing mentoring, a summer bridge program, and college scholarships. Eight RCCI sites won federal GEAR-UP grants for similar programs designed to raise the college-going rate for low-income youth. Two others won competitive grants to create high-tech science enrichment programs for K-12 students and teachers.

  Two colleges — Hazard (KY) and Sinte Gleska (a tribal college in Rosebud, SD) — established programs in affiliation with the National Writing Project to provide professional development for elementary, secondary, and postsecondary teachers in the teaching of writing. And Meridian Community College (Meridian, MS) mobilized a large, broad-based community coalition called "MathFirst" to improve education from preschool through adult. MathFirst

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galvanized attention on public education, obtained more than $1,000,000 in grants to strengthen local education, and implemented cutting-edge teaching strategies that raised reading scores in elementary schools.

- ***Developing distance education systems.*** When RCCI began in 1994, the distance education revolution was just beginning. Internet courses were virtually nonexistent. States were just starting to install T-1 lines to link their community colleges to the information highway, and most rural colleges did not have e-mail or Internet access for faculty and staff. Two RCCI colleges with vast service areas (Northern New Mexico and Southwest Texas Junior College) sought to develop interactive video networks to link their main campuses with satellite centers and regional high schools. RCCI provided resources and learning experiences that expanded institutional capacity, including: seed funding for a distance education coordinator; exposure to cutting-edge programs through field trips; flexible funding for staff development; and on-site technical assistance.

  RCCI sites also have worked to reduce the digital divide in their communities. Alabama Southern and Southwest Texas Junior College, for example, installed interactive video equipment at several community locations to accommodate continuing education classes and videoconferences. Wallace Community College (Selma, AL) established community technology centers to provide computer and Internet access to low-income adults and youth.

- ***Improving developmental studies and academic support.*** Many students enroll in community college with weak academic skills, and before entering certificate or degree programs they must complete developmental education classes. Often, these students get discouraged and fail to complete degrees. After analyzing data on graduation rates, several RCCI colleges sought ways to improve developmental studies, academic support, and other services to help students succeed. Alabama Southern, for example, explored best practices from around the country and revamped its approach to teaching and learning, making a heavy investment in staff development.

- ***Creating a college environment that is family-friendly and culturally supportive.*** Many rural community college students are the first in their families to attend college, and their ties to family remain strong. A significant segment are parents themselves. Early in the planning process, some RCCI colleges decided the best way to increase student success was to help families be successful.

  Fort Peck Community College, for example, created a Center for Family and Community Development to manage all the college's community outreach programs, including a family literacy program. The Center helped start two native language immersion preschools on the reservation as a way to strengthen families and preserve culture. And it created a wellness center, open to the community, that teaches physical and emotional fitness, healing, diet, and nutrition.

  Laredo Community College (Texas) tailored its work to the family-centered Latino culture. It initiated a program for children living in colonias (impoverished settlements that lack basic infrastructure and public services) and their families. Children are tutored by college students, and they participate in summer events at the college that introduce them to college and career. Parents receive literacy instruction, job training, and help in supporting their children's development.

  Cultural preservation is a strength of tribal colleges, and during visits to tribal campuses, leaders from other RCCI sites were impressed by the impact of affirming and valuing students' culture. Sinte Gleska and Southeast Kentucky developed a joint course that gave their students the opportunity to learn from one another about Native American and Appalachian culture. Other colleges initiated activities to celebrate the literary and cultural heritage of their regions.

- ***Reaching out aggressively to draw more disadvantaged and minority students to the college.*** RCCI colleges enroll a high percentage of low-income students, yet RCCI challenged the colleges to identify disadvantaged populations who were not being touched by the college. For example, two colleges hired recruiters to target prospective African-American students, who were underrepresented at the college. After a careful assessment of who utilized the college and who did not, Danville Community College (VA) established four neighborhood centers that provide GED, computer literacy, and continuing education courses for underserved populations.

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BARRIERS TO REALIZING THE RCCI VISION

RCCI showed how community colleges can be innovators and leaders in economic/community development and educational access. It also pointed out the challenges rural colleges face when they take on a broad, community development agenda. Our hope is that the RCCI experience will spur public and philanthropic funders to recognize the potential of rural community colleges and that more funders will provide the affirmation, seed money, learning opportunities, and policy advocacy needed to spread the RCCI vision to more colleges.

Small Institutions, Tight Budgets

The RCCI demonstration asked colleges that were already strapped for resources to take on an expanded agenda. Typically, rural colleges lack flexible money to support new, innovative activities that go beyond their core educational mission. Their faculty and staff are stretched thin, each wearing many hats. Small size and low-wealth tax districts give many rural colleges a meager revenue base, while large distances and severe educational needs make their regions expensive to serve. In today's volatile economy, with many states facing budget deficits and passing the shortfall on to their community colleges, it is harder than ever for colleges to think expansively about their roles in the community. Tribal colleges' funding situation is even more precarious. They depend on federal appropriations, which provide far less revenue per student than the typical community college receives from its state.

RCCI's response:

- ***Find college presidents who have a broad vision for their institutions' role in the community.*** Throughout the country, there are many rural college presidents who recognize that working to improve economic conditions in their communities is essential to their institutions' mission. RCCI tapped some of these leaders; there are many more who, with a boost, could transform their institutions into catalysts for community development.
- ***Open up more federal grant programs to rural community colleges.*** Federal grants have been invaluable in enabling rural colleges (RCCI sites and others) to take on active community development agendas and aggressive access missions. In the access realm, grant programs like Title III, Talent Search, and TRIO (all authorized under the Higher Education Act) have been important. During the course of the RCCI demonstration, we worked to raise federal agencies' awareness of community colleges as potential grantees outside the traditional education realm, and some new grant opportunities opened up at the U.S. Department of Agriculture, HUD, and other agencies. Such opportunities can make a tremendous difference in empowering colleges to take on new roles in their communities.

- ***Provide tools, skills, ideas, moral support, and seed money to increase colleges' capacity.*** RCCI's *Moving from Vision to Action* planning process provided a structure for developing new activities. The RCCI peer network provided moral support as well as opportunities to share strategies. Exposure to access and economic development experts and model projects in other communities gave the colleges new ideas. Through workshops and one-on-one technical assistance, several RCCI colleges enhanced their capacity to write successful grant proposals. Finally, the flexible seed money provided by The Ford Foundation enabled sites to leverage other public and private resources.
- ***Rely on college/community teams to forge alliances, leverage resources, and spread the RCCI vision.*** The community members on RCCI teams brought people-power, fresh perspectives, and access to resources that the colleges could not have tapped on their own.

State Policy and the RCCI Vision

The community college core mission varies by state. Some states place emphasis on workforce development, while others emphasize college transfer. Some fund their community colleges to provide small business assistance or operate welfare-to-work programs, while others provide funding only for traditional credit courses. The adequacy of state funding levels for small, rural institutions also varies across the country. Some states, for instance, make an effort to equalize funding for community colleges in low-wealth tax districts, while others do not. In addition, different governance systems can affect colleges' independence and responsiveness to their communities. In some states, community colleges are governed by local boards, while in other states they report to a state agency that hires and fires the college president.

Despite these differences, there is no state where core community college funding adequately supports the aggressive access and economic development activities advocated by RCCI.

RCCI's response:

- ***Empower and fund individual colleges to go beyond their state-mandated core roles.*** For colleges that shared the RCCI philosophy, the demonstration provided the boost they needed to lead new access and economic development initiatives. It did this, as noted above, by offering skills, tools, learning opportunities, a supportive peer network, and seed money. (As with any institution, however, the core functions of the community college must come first. Colleges that were struggling to provide core educational services, expand their campuses, or deal with governance conflicts were less able to invest their energy in the more expansive agenda of RCCI.)
- ***Advocate for supportive state policy.*** In our ideal world, states would give their community colleges a mandate for broad educational access, and they would fund colleges to play leadership roles in community and economic development. This support would be institutionalized and long term rather than in the form of short-term categorical grants. (An example is North Carolina's funding for small business centers at community colleges, which has been part of the state's community college budget for a decade or more.) Throughout the RCCI demonstration, MDC has advocated for state policy that supports the economic development and access mission. Today, with the track record of the RCCI colleges, we are hopeful that more states will embrace the RCCI vision.[6]

[6] See Rubin and Autry, "Rural Community Colleges: Catalysts for Economic Renewal," ECS Center for Community College Policy, September 1998 (available at www.communitycollegepolicy.org/html/policy issues.htm), and Chesson and Rubin, "Toward Rural Prosperity: A State Policy Framework in Support of Rural Community Colleges," MDC Inc., 2002.

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Rural Isolation

Many rural colleges and communities are isolated from their peers and from innovative ideas. Travel is costly and time-consuming for colleges in remote areas. Seldom can they afford to send faculty and staff to learning events around the country. When they do attend community college conferences, they find that few presentations address the concerns of small, rural colleges or communities.

RCCI's response:

- *Provide exposure to new ideas.* RCCI colleges were introduced to successful rural strategies through speakers at RCCI institutes and other learning events; video and print materials prepared by MDC; and technical assistance provided by regional and national experts. They learned much from visits to peer institutions and model programs around the country.
- *Create an active peer-learning network.* RCCI colleges found they also had much to learn from one another. They valued this element of the demonstration so highly that they created a membership organization, the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) to continue and expand their network after their Ford grants ended.[7] Recognizing the value of peer learning, The Ford Foundation is supporting a follow-up phase of RCCI that will bring more colleges into the learning network.[8] In addition to learning from their peers in the U.S., RCCI colleges benefited from a relationship with the University of Namibia, funded by The Ford Foundation and facilitated by MDC. Faculty, administrators, and community leaders from Namibia visited several RCCI sites; RCCI colleges and technical assistance providers advised the University of Namibia on developing community-oriented programs; and the University had faculty and student exchanges with RCCI colleges.

The Challenge of Economic Development

Working on economic development proved to be more difficult for colleges and communities than expanding access to education. It is a complex arena and one in which colleges are not traditionally central players. It takes more than good intentions to build an economy, especially in places that have lost their historic job base of manufacturing, agriculture, mining, or timber and have no obvious prospects for developing new jobs. To thrive, those communities and regions must develop a new economic core based on distinctive assets that can make them competitive in the larger economy. That requires insight and vision that goes well beyond the traditional economic developer's work of recruiting a plant to fill a vacant building.

RCCI's response:

- ***Recognize that changing mind-sets is an important first step.*** In economic development as in other fields, new consciousness often precedes change. Through exposure to innovative ideas, RCCI teams raised awareness in their communities of the need for new directions in economic development, and they introduced new strategic approaches.

[7] For more information on RCCA, see www.ruralcommunitycolleges.org.

[8] The new, four-year phase of RCCI is being managed by the Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University and the North Central Regional Center for Rural Development at Iowa State University.

- ***Provide learning opportunities that expand both vision and concrete knowledge of promising practices.*** Again, the demonstration cultivated new knowledge and capacity through a variety of learning experiences. At RCCI institutes, teams were introduced to leading thinkers with hands-on experience in community economic development and tribal development. These experts also worked on-site in RCCI communities, where they challenged the conventional thinking about economic development and advised teams on design of particular strategies. Other effective learning experiences included: visits to successful rural development programs; seminars and teleconferences on topics like bridging the digital divide, organizing regional economic summits, and designing community leadership programs; and video and print materials profiling innovative approaches to rural development.

Institutional Change

In many cases, before a college can work for change in the community, the college itself has to change. To embrace the RCCI vision, many colleges needed to look inward and build their own institutional capacity. This capacity-building took many forms. Some colleges reorganized their departments to reflect a stronger commitment to community service; some beefed up their fundraising capacity; others initiated new curricula linked to economic development opportunities. And in some cases, the college needed to become more responsive to community concerns.

RCCI's response:

- ***Facilitate self-assessment.*** RCCI's structured planning process encouraged colleges to look at their own strengths and weaknesses as well as external barriers to progress in the community.
- ***Provide moral support and coaching for the work of leading change.*** Leading institutional change inherently carries more personal risk than maintaining the status quo. It takes vision and courage on the part of college leaders. At the local level, RCCI's team structure helped create a supportive climate. Community members on RCCI teams helped push the college to adopt new roles and behaviors. The larger RCCI network also provided valuable support, as college presidents and administrators affirmed the actions of their peers at other colleges.
- ***Use college/community teams to strengthen college/community bonds.*** Community colleges vary widely in their degree of involvement with the community. RCCI demonstration colleges were selected, in part, for having strong community ties as evidenced through partnerships with K-12 schools, presidents' participation on local boards, and active service learning programs. Yet even the most community-oriented institutions became more responsive to community needs when they sustained an active college/community team to plan and oversee their RCCI work. Having such a leadership group that met regularly and worked together on a community development and education agenda gave the college new insights into community concerns and gave community leaders a new understanding of the college.

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STRATEGIES FOR FUNDERS

The RCCI experience points to many ways funders can nurture rural development by investing in community colleges. There are opportunities to help individual colleges become stronger vehicles for educational access and community change. There are also opportunities to spark systemic change that will affect multiple colleges.

Invest in Rural Community Colleges

First, grantmakers can ***fund community-oriented programs*** at rural community colleges. Small, rural colleges typically lack "venture capital" to initiate new or experimental programs. At the state or regional level, a new ventures fund could provide seed money for colleges to initiate community-oriented programming that falls outside the state funding formula (or federal formula, in the case of tribal colleges). At the local level, funders can support individual colleges in undertaking innovative activities such as:

- outreach to underserved populations
- service learning linked to community development
- community leadership development
- K-16 partnerships
- curriculum development in fields relevant to the local culture and economy
- distance learning and technology.

Second, funders can ***support institutional development*** and help ***break down isolation*** in rural colleges and communities. In RCCI, opportunities for staff development, technical assistance, and networking with peers were invaluable in building colleges' capacity to innovate and develop effective educational and community development activities. Small grants for staff development or technical assistance can go a long way at a rural institution that otherwise could not afford to send faculty and staff to out-of-town training events, sponsor sabbaticals, or bring experts to campus to advise on designing or improving programs.

Today, rural colleges can benefit from two offshoots of the RCCI demonstration that provide new opportunities for peer networking and learning, and funders can support colleges' participation in these two opportunities. The first is the Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA), a nonprofit membership organization that seeks to reduce rural colleges' isolation, spread best practices in access and economic development, and be a national voice for rural community colleges. Funders can sponsor colleges' membership in RCCA to enable them to participate in this peer network. They can also provide direct support for RCCA learning events — including conferences, field trips, and topical seminars.

In addition, The Ford Foundation is making a modest grant for a four-year program to spread RCCI to more colleges. The program will be managed by two U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded rural development centers: the Southern Rural Development Center at Mississippi State University and the North Central

Regional Center for Rural Development at Iowa State University. Public or private funders can interface with the new program in at least two ways. First, they can sponsor statewide or regional RCCI programs that build on the work being done by the two rural development centers. Second, they can support the work of new RCCI colleges through "innovation grants." (The new program does not provide implementation grants; sites must raise that money themselves.)

Invest in Systemic Change

While assistance to individual colleges is important, potentially even more powerful is systemic change to help more community colleges become agents for rural development. One point of intervention is in the ***community college leadership programs*** that prepare people to become presidents and administrators of rural institutions. The community college world currently is bracing for a massive turnover in institutional leadership as hundreds of presidents, vice presidents, and deans approach retirement. New leaders will get their training at graduate schools of education (typically in Ed.D. or Ph.D. programs) and professional development programs offered by the League for Innovation, American Association of Community Colleges, other professional organizations, and some universities.

In the 1960s, the federal government as well as the W.K. Kellogg Foundation and other national foundations made major investments to create community college-oriented programs within university schools of education. The impact of that ramp-up lasted 30 years. Today, a new investment is needed — not just to reinvigorate and expand community college leadership programs, but also to create programs that address the unique issues community college leaders face in rural environments.[9] Philanthropic and public resources could have far-reaching impact on community colleges if they strengthened and expanded leadership programs — both degree programs within universities and professional development programs — and provided incentives for selected programs to build in a rural emphasis.

Public policy is another important arena for systemic change. ***At the federal policy level***, many of the core educational access issues that affect rural colleges, their communities, and students are the same issues affecting all community colleges: student aid policy; funding for community outreach and institutional capacity-building (such as Talent Search, Upward Bound, Title III, Title V, Gear-Up, and Community Technology Centers); and federal workforce and welfare programs. In addition, there are some unique rural concerns: access to affordable telecommunications in rural communities; adequate appropriations for tribal colleges; and inclusion of rural colleges as eligible applicants for federal economic development and rural development programs. A new policy challenge that is part of the vision for the next phase of RCCI (2002-05) is to build partnerships between community colleges and land grant universities.

During the RCCI demonstration, MDC and RCCI presidents spoke with federal agencies about several of these issues, and AACC created a Rural Policy Roundtable to give a greater voice to the concerns of rural colleges. The Rural Community College Alliance (RCCA) aspires to become a strong national voice for rural colleges and rural development. Today, funders can amplify that voice by supporting rural colleges' participation in RCCA and other policy-oriented

[9] The only rural-oriented program we are aware of is the MidSouth Partnership for Rural Community Colleges, housed at Mississippi State University. This evolving program offers a Ph.D. in educational leadership. Its innovative curriculum integrates rural issues and community development with educational administration.

consortia. They can also support research and analysis to identify more opportunities for supportive federal policy.

State policy is potentially the most powerful lever in increasing rural colleges' ability to be catalysts for access and economic development. The biggest chunk of community college funding comes from the state. While a strong college president with support from local trustees can be quite independent and innovative, directions and priorities at most colleges closely follow state policy. MDC has worked to raise states' awareness of policies to support the RCCI vision for rural colleges.[10] More advocacy is needed. Unfortunately, in a time of tight budgets, when core funding for community colleges is being cut, it is difficult for states to think about expanding the mission of their community colleges.

There are, however, ways states can redeploy resources to take advantage of their community colleges without necessarily increasing state budgets. For instance, they can promote and reward community service and service learning at community colleges; they can encourage colleges to develop community leadership programs; they can utilize community colleges as institutional homes for small business assistance programs. Foundations can encourage innovation in state policy by supporting demonstration activity at colleges and dissemination of the "best practices" that result. They can help ensure states' commitment to educational access by supporting research and advocacy groups that are dedicated to maintaining high-quality, affordable public higher education.

[10] See RCCI policy papers by Rubin and Autry (ECS, 1998) and Chesson and Rubin (MDC, 2002).

APPENDIX A

Approaches to Rural Community Development: Selected Public and Philanthropic Programs

Program	Funder	Objectives & Assumptions	Approach	Lead Local Organizations	Time Frame*	Funding Level
RCCI	Ford Foundation	**Objective:** Help community colleges in distressed rural regions move their people and communities toward prosperity. **Assumption:** Communities must focus on economic development and improving access to education.	Provide learning opportunities for leadership teams. Build the capacity of colleges while helping them lead change efforts in their communities. Identify policy challenges and solutions.	Community colleges, working in collaboration with community partners.	Nine pilot sites received 7-year funding; 15 others received 4-year funding	Nine-month planning grants, followed by $50-75,000/year implementation grants.
Rural Empowerment Zones (EZ) and Enterprise Communities (EC)	U.S. Department of Agriculture	**Objective:** Increase economic opportunity through job creation, job training, small business development, and infrastructure improvements. **Assumption:** Local communities can best assess their own challenges and identify solutions.	Competitive grant program in which applicants must demonstrate a high level of citizen participation in planning and implementation.	Town, county, and tribal governments; economic development agencies; and nonprofit organizations.	10 years	EZ's receive $20-40 million over 10 years; EC's receive $2.5-3 million. Sites also receive preference in applications for other federal grants.
Community Ventures	Northwest Area Foundation	**Objectives:** Reduce poverty; empower communities. **Assumptions:** Solutions to community problems must be locally driven, and communities need substantial resources (both financial and knowledge) to support local efforts.	The initiative begins with a 1-2 year planning phase to build relationships and strategies in each community.	Nonprofit organizations, religious institutions, local government, and others.	10 years	The foundation is investing $150 million in intensive work with 16 communities.
MidSouth Delta Initiative	W.K. Kellogg Foundation	**Objective:** Build social capital through public/private partnerships. **Assumption:** Grassroots community coalitions can create new social and civic leadership networks and foster economic renewal.	Invest in local capacity, strengthen local intermediary organizations, identify policy challenges and solutions.	Community-based alliances.	3-5 years	$10,000 planning grants, followed by $100,000/year implementation grants to 15 communities.
Program for the Rural Carolinas	The Duke Endowment	**Objective:** Improve the well-being of rural communities and people through improved employment and asset-building opportunities. **Assumption:** Economic development strategies must be complemented by long-term work on civic engagement.	Build partnerships that bring to the table employers, low-income people who need jobs, and organizations that provide education, training, and support services.	Collaborative community teams, assembled by rural hospitals and churches.	3 years	Seven sites are receiving $150,000/year for broad community-change efforts; 16 are receiving $75,000/year for smaller projects.

* *Time frame specifies the term of grants to communities. In most cases, there was additional time built in on the front end for the funder and/or intermediary to design the program and select grantees.*

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Appendix B

Lessons on Design of Rural Development Programs

Community change must be locally driven, but outside resources can be invaluable in instigating and supporting local efforts. Besides providing dollars for particular projects, funders can help spark a process for long-term change and development. This can occur when they provide exposure to new ideas and tools and when they offer incentives for people to come together to build new relationships, form new partnerships, and initiate new strategies.

Lessons from RCCI — filtered through MDC's 35-year experience in rural development and community change — offer the following wisdom for funders in the design of local, regional, or national programs for rural community development. These lessons apply to programs led by any type of local organization, not just community colleges.

Start with a Conceptual Framework

Long before "theory of change" became a buzz-phrase in the world of philanthropy, MDC believed it was important to begin a program with a conceptual framework that lays out a clear philosophy, goals, and rationale as a guide for local leaders engaged in our projects. At the outset of RCCI, we wrote a short conceptual paper in collaboration with our program officers at The Ford Foundation and shared it with team members from the colleges. It presented RCCI's assumptions and core principles, defined access and economic development, suggested roles that community colleges could play, and described important institutional capacities for colleges seeking to lead this work. The paper was revised three times over the course of the demonstration to reflect new ideas and insights that emerged from the colleges' experiences; ideas were contributed by RCCI staff and coaches, technical assistance providers, and members of AACC's assessment team.[11]

The conceptual framework helped MDC staff and coaches and RCCI college/community teams stay focused on the "what" and "how" of RCCI. It formed the basis for presentations and discussions at RCCI institutes and staff retreats and, to some extent, provided grounding for AACC's assessment of the Initiative.

An early conceptual question in the design of a community-change program is, "What type of organization can best lead the work?" Funders seek organizations whose mission and operating style are compatible with the program's goals and theory of change. In the case of RCCI, The Ford Foundation and MDC believed the community college mission was a good fit with the demonstration's twin goals of economic development and educational access. We also thought community colleges' mode of operation, which relies on community partnerships, was a good fit with the RCCI process of collaborative, team-led community change.

Identify Local Partners with Vision and Commitment, and Build their Capacity

Once types of organizations are identified, a funder is faced with identifying particular grantees that can achieve success. RCCI pointed out three crucial factors for an organization taking on an expansive rural development agenda: leadership, institutional stability, and a supportive political climate.

- **Leadership.** In RCCI, the most successful sites had college presidents who were well-respected by community leaders and personally engaged in RCCI efforts. Depth of leadership on the team was also important. Successful sites had a president, RCCI team leader, and others who embraced the ideas of change and transformation for both the college and the community. They welcomed partnerships with other community leaders, institutions, and organizations.
- **Institutional Stability.** Institutional stability was also important for success in RCCI. Community colleges were chosen

[11] The final version of the RCCI conceptual framework, *Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas*, was published in September 2001. It is available on the RCCI website, www.mdcinc.org/rcci, or can be ordered from MDC.

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as the lead organizations in RCCI partly because they have a relatively stable base of public funding. But institutional stability involves much more than an assured annual budget. The colleges that accomplished the most had mastered delivery of their core educational functions and were ready and able to take on new roles and responsibilities.

- **Community Readiness.** In some cases, even strong institutions with outstanding leadership struggle to have an impact on community change. Some communities have a political or civic climate so dysfunctional that interventions like RCCI can make only a marginal difference. Funders need to consider the nature of community problems their program can tackle and seek communities as well as organizations that are a good match.

It is important to recognize that even the most capable rural organizations often need further capacity-building: In distressed rural areas, even the strongest organizations can be isolated and resource-poor. Successful RCCI colleges looked inward and set goals for enhancing their own capacity while also addressing outward-focused economic development and access goals. Grantmakers need to recognize this fact of life in distressed rural areas, where the organizational infrastructure is thin. They should build in time and resources to help grantees with organizational development needs as well as community-change work.

Balance Invention and Replication

RCCI empowered teams to examine their local situation, explore strategies tested by other communities, and develop solutions best suited to their situation. This invention took place within the framework of the RCCI initiative — i.e., a focus on access and economic development, building on assets, and commitment to inclusion and equity. The combination of a conceptual framework, teams whose work is driven by shared values, a structured planning process, and opportunities for learning is a powerful mix that can generate innovative and effective strategies.

By facilitating cross-cultural learning, valuing local cultures and traditions, and providing flexible funding for locally defined projects, RCCI avoided the one-size-fits-all, hierarchical strategies that have historically characterized national rural programs.

— Executive Summary of *RCCI National Assessment Report* AACC, 2001

The replication of proven rural development and education strategies has much value — certainly, communities can learn from others' experiences and need not always reinvent the wheel. But if a funder wants to effect broad community change, helping communities replicate programmatic strategies is not enough. It is also essential to build community partnerships and equip teams to assess their local conditions and adapt or invent solutions that fit their situation.

To balance invention and replication, funders need to provide a structure with nonnegotiable core concepts and goals, while also being flexible and encouraging grantees to develop and adapt local strategies. To nurture invention, grantees need opportunities to learn about new approaches and technical assistance to help them sort through what will work best in their community.

Invest in Learning for Individual Leaders, Community Teams, and Institutions

In rural communities, which tend to be isolated both geographically and intellectually, investment in learning is essential to community development. Intellectual isolation impedes progress, and funders can make a lasting contribution to community development when they expand grantees' capacity to innovate. The National Rural Funders Collaborative recognizes this need and is striving to create a "learning community" for its grantees and partners. Learning is also an emphasis in the philanthropic programs listed in Appendix A.

Opportunities to learn from their peers at other colleges, resource people, and technical assistance providers had a big impact on RCCI teams. Enhancing this value was the cross-cultural nature of the Initiative. The Ford Foundation insured diversity in RCCI from the start by selecting sites that represented the major persistent poverty regions of rural America — Appalachia, the Deep South, the Southwest, and Indian reservations. However, neither the Foundation nor MDC anticipated just how much the sites would learn from their peers from other regions and other cultures. Team members found cultural differences to be stimulating. At the same time, the similarity of challenges faced in places as different as South Texas, coastal South Carolina, and Appalachia were striking. Several RCCI team members observed that getting to know peers from different regions was like holding up a mirror to help them understand their own community better.

Local or regional funders may not be able to achieve this degree of diversity in a rural development program. However, if they recognize the importance of learning — including cross-cultural learning — they can support grantees' travel to participate in learning events in other regions, including visits to model programs in communities similar and different from the grantees' homes.

The Role of an Intermediary

RCCI was a successful demonstration of the capacity of communities, with support and assistance, to find their own solutions to community challenges... Central to this process were the strategic interventions of a third-party manager that prodded the colleges to take risks and provided a supportive environment for learning at all levels. Especially through national institutes and a vision-to-action planning process, the managing partner created a national network that helped sustain and broaden a commitment to local change.
— Executive Summary of *RCCI National Assessment Report*, AACC, 2001

The activities that made RCCI an effective learning experience could not have occurred without an intermediary organization managing the Initiative. MDC designed and orchestrated a variety of learning events including annual institutes, annual leadership forums for college presidents and RCCI team leaders,

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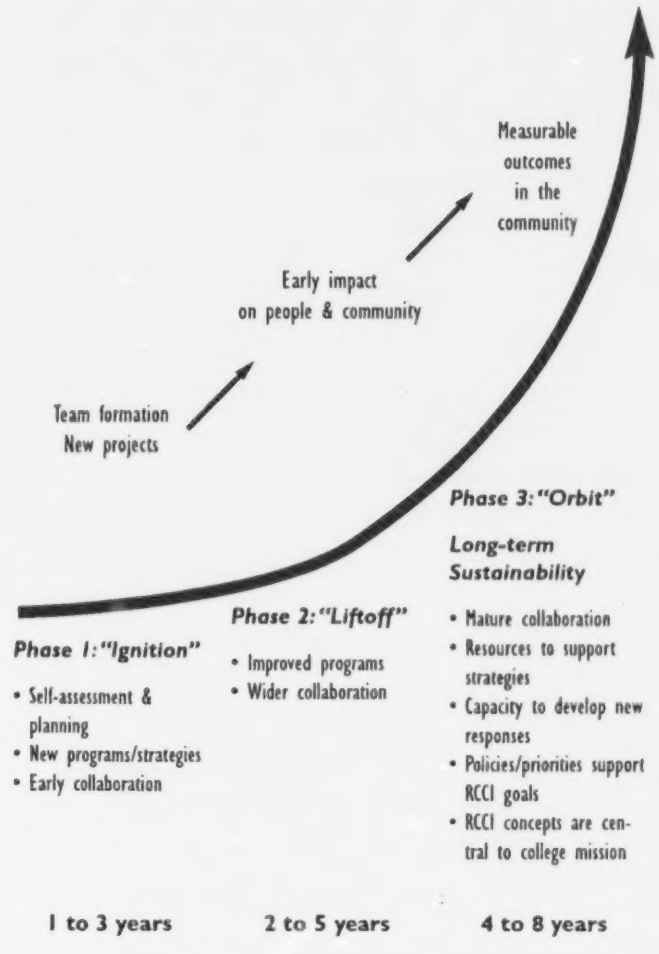
topical seminars and teleconferences, and site visits to model programs around the country. We were deliberate in anticipating and responding to what the sites needed at each stage of the Initiative, and we tried to design learning experiences that were participatory, engaging, and in tune with adult learning styles.

We coordinated technical assistance to the sites, and we provided coaches who helped keep teams on target with the demonstration's goals. Besides helping teams with their initial planning, coaches led periodic team reflection sessions on accomplishments and future directions, helped teams get over humps, and linked them with relevant resources. MDC also produced (in conjunction with Video Dialog Inc.) many video and print materials for the colleges.

Moving Toward Long-Term Sustainability of RCCI Efforts



When should a funder consider including an intermediary as part of a rural development program? The benefits an intermediary brings must be weighed against the cost — less dollars available for local grantees. In a national or regional program with multiple sites, we believe the value an intermediary can add by facilitating learning and coaching often pays back many times in program outcomes.

Recognize that Community Renewal Takes Time

The process of community renewal requires building allegiance to new concepts, building cohesive leadership capable of executing change, developing new programs and systems, and planning for sustainability. This is not a quick process.

The RCCI demonstration was fortunate — and unusual — in receiving seven years of funding from The Ford Foundation. The demonstration spanned the tenure of two program officers in one division of the Foundation and three program officers in another division. Yet even this generous time frame was not long enough for many sites to achieve sustainability in their RCCI efforts. This was especially true for the 15 colleges that joined the demonstration in 1997 and received just four years of implementation support.

Based on the RCCI experiences and MDC's other work with communities, we believe community renewal takes between five and eight years to take root. The early work of establishing a leadership team; planning; and initiating new programs, strategies, and collaborations takes a few years. Over the next two to five years (depending on the readiness of the community and the difficulty of its challenges), we typically see improved programs, wider collaborations, and early impact on people and community. After four to eight years, a successful community renewal effort can reach the "orbit" phase. At that point, the community has lasting capacity to address new problems and secure resources to support new strategies for economic development and educational access.

Foundations increasingly recognize the importance of supporting long-term work in communities. They know a process for community change that builds new relationships and strengthens community institutions has greater long-term impact than a discrete, two-year community-development project.

But how many grantmakers can make an eight-year — or even four-year — commitment to a community? If funders cannot make long-term commitments, they can at least be strategic in finding ways to give communities enough time to succeed. For instance, they can help grantees begin thinking about sustainability early on. When communities integrate short-term projects with longer-term community-change work, they can achieve some relatively quick success that may help them obtain follow-up funding to continue addressing deeper problems in the community. A grantmaker also can seek other funding partners to carry the work forward.

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RCCI Demonstration Colleges

Alabama Southern Community College, Monroeville, AL

Blackfeet Community College, Browning, MT

Coahoma Community College, Clarksdale, MS

Danville Community College, Danville, VA

Fort Belknap College, Harlem, MT

Fort Peck Community College, Poplar, MT

Hazard Community College, Hazard, KY

Laredo Community College, Laredo, TX

Meridian Community College, Meridian, MS

Mountain Empire Community College, Big Stone Gap, VA

New Mexico State University at Carlsbad, Carlsbad, NM

Northern New Mexico Community College, Espanola, NM

Phillips Community College, Helena, AR

Prestonsburg Community College, Prestonsburg, KY

Salish Kootenai College, Pablo, MT

Sinte Gleska University, Rosebud, SD

Sitting Bull College, Fort Yates, SD

Somerset Community College, Somerset, KY

Southeast Community College, Cumberland, KY

Southeastern Community College, Whiteville, NC

Southwest Texas Junior College, Uvalde, TX

Technical College of the Lowcountry, Beaufort, SC

University of New Mexico at Gallup, Gallup, NM

Wallace Community College Selma, Selma, AL

RCCI Publications and Videos

Over the course of the RCCI demonstration, MDC has produced many publications and videos to guide college/community teams in their RCCI work and to share lessons from RCCI with others interested in rural development and rural education. A complete list, with information on ordering and downloading, is available on the RCCI website, www.mdcinc.org/rcci.

The following RCCI resources may be of particular interest to funders and policymakers:

Strategies for Rural Development and Increased Access to Education: A Toolkit for Rural Community Colleges. Includes 11 videos, a guidebook for *Moving from Vision to Action*, and a notebook of case stories on effective strategies for rural development and education.

RCCI: Planting the Seeds of Change. These two videos and companion guidebooks document the multiyear collaborative community change process at two RCCI sites and discuss the multiple levels of competencies needed to lead community change.

Revitalizing Rural Communities: Lessons from the RCCI. This paper draws lessons from the RCCI experience that have relevance for other rural community development efforts. It is designed to inspire similar efforts in other rural communities and to inform rural development practitioners, funders, and policymakers.

Expanding Economic and Educational Opportunity in Distressed Rural Areas: A Conceptual Framework for the Rural Community College Initiative. This paper, the "bible of RCCI," presents the demonstration's vision and core concepts.

Toward Rural Prosperity, A State Policy Framework in Support of Rural Community Colleges. This paper offers a framework for assessing the alignment of state policies with the RCCI philosophy. It addresses state funding and governance issues as well as support for community and economic development, educational access, workforce development, and technology.

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